

# The South Danvers Observer

## *"The Dictate of Ordinary Prudence": The First Vaccinations in South Danvers*

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—Controversy around the subject of vaccination is not new.

In our country, the debate began in 1721 when Cotton Mather convinced Dr. Zabdiel Boylston to conduct the first inoculations against the dreaded disease, Smallpox. When Boston Selectmen discovered their actions, they forbade them to continue with what they saw as an unproven and possibly dangerous practice.

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Views among physicians of the time were generally negative regarding inoculations. Some felt such interference in the course of a disease defied nature as defined by the Puritan view of God. Others that it went against medical ethic of the day.

In time, though, many came to realize that smallpox vaccination offered protection against a deadly scourge. The death rate from smallpox for the unvaccinated was



Derby-Crowninshield-Endicott-Osborn  
mansion on Andover Street,  
possible site of  
Smallpox inoculations

about 15% compared to 2.5% for the inoculated. During the Revolutionary War, George Washington required all troops to be vaccinated against smallpox.

Similar efforts were also made in South Danvers in 1778. However, the wording in the Town Records, "Such of the inhabitants as Shall Chuse [sic] to take the Small Pox that way," reveals that those who wished vaccination had to bear the cost themselves. Beyond the fee for the vaccine and physician's time, any who went through with the vaccination needed to be quarantined from one to three weeks. Which all but guaranteed that only the wealthy could afford inoculation.

In 1792, South Danvers made another attempt to provide a quarantined site for any who wished inoculation. The list of vaccinated included only the more prominent citizens of the town. Beyond funds levied to care for the

poor, there were no monies set aside to insure public health.

The first official committee to address health concerns in South Danvers wasn't established until 1832. However, its main purpose was to "remove all Filth of any kind whatever, which shall be found in the streets, lanes, wharves, Docks [yes, the town had wharves and docks] or any other place whatever within the limits of the Town..." [Danvers Town Records, 1832]

The first official South Danvers Board of Health was formed in 1846, again to address sanitary issues. Not until the early 20th century did Peabody and other local towns seek to address the causes of infection with an organized public effort, using publicly funded nurses to educate people on methods to prevent the spread of disease.

To Consider the Petition of John Lupton and others respecting Inoculating  
for the Small Pox at Capt. Derby's Farm or some other place or places in this  
Town Such of the Inhabitants as shall chuse to take the Small Pox that  
way, and to take any other order respecting the Small Pox they may think proper.

From the Records of Danvers  
May 2, 1778

"We learn that there are cases of Small Pox in Marblehead and Lynn, and our hope is to prevent its nearer approach by the only safe method and one which is within the reach of all... Would it not be well to institute some enquiry through the public schools or by some other mode, how far vaccination has been adopted or neglected..."

From the Danvers Courier  
February 14, 1846

## Dr. Joseph Shed, 1782-1853

—It is one of those strange twists of fate that two doctors who set up their practices in South Danvers within a year of each other would eventually die ten days apart in 1853. While both began their work in South Danvers as physicians, their interests took them down starkly different paths in life.

Joseph Shed was born in Tewksbury on June 30, 1782, the second son of Jacob Jr. and Molly (Goodhue) Shed. Little is known of his early years, though his family seems to have had some prominence in the town of Tewksbury.

He studied medicine under Dr. Benjamin Kittredge of Andover and came to South Danvers in 1807 to establish himself as a physician.

About the time he arrived in South Danvers, Jasper Needham, a fairly prosperous tavern and store owner with many acres of land, died. The tavern was located on the Newburyport Turnpike, making it a convenient place for travelers to stop. His widow, Mary (Twiss) Needham (1774-1860), had five surviving children, Stephen, age 13, Jasper, age 11, Elias, age 9, Elisabeth age 7 and Mary age 2. In a time when women weren't legally allowed to manage their own affairs, Mary hired Nathan Felton to represent her in the

claim for her husband's property. Eventually the land was passed onto her son, Elias, and remained in the family until 1923.

Shed quickly established his practice and, as was common at the time, served as executor to many local estates. Perhaps this was how he met Mary Needham. However it occurred, in 1809, two years after his arrival, he married Mary and she went on to have four more children with Shed—Maria, Lucinda, Joseph Goodhue and Sophronia. Having his own children didn't keep Shed from caring for his stepchildren. In 1817, he acted as attorney in the interests of his stepchildren, Elias, Elisabeth and Mary in the sale of their father's land in Lynn.

In 1816, Shed bought Gideon Foster's Main Street home. Since he was an active Mason, he offered it as a meeting place for the Jordan Lodge located in this town. In 1818, he cut back on his medical practice to announce his intention to open an Apothecary Shop in his home.

His work as an Apothecary seemed to thrive until 1822, when he unexpectedly announced that he had moved to Cambridge. This decision seems to have resulted from his having prescribed the wrong medicine

for a patient, causing the illness to worsen. It seems plausible that Shed's remorse over this incident turned his attention to his other career, the law. Though he remained in Cambridge working as an attorney until 1830, he continued to represent his Danvers neighbors in legal matters. Upon his return to South Danvers, he seems to have taken up his work as an Apothecary, though he devoted most of his attention to his legal practice.

Apparently, his conscientiousness regarding the law drew the attention of the town and he was elected Town Clerk in 1835, a post he kept until his death. Many commented on his attention to detail, especially with regard to his effort to keep accurate vital records for all the citizens of the town.

He retired from his work as an Apothecary in 1849 and posted an advertisement for someone to take over the business. Though it's uncertain whether he found anyone, his daughter Lucinda's son, George Meacom, eventually took over the business.

Joseph Shed died in May, 1853 at the age of 70.

### *Joseph Shed*

TAKES this opportunity to inform his friends and the public, that he has lately opened a shop, a little below the sign of the Eagle, in Danvers in which he has, and intends to keep constantly, an assortment of Drugs, Medicines, Dye-Stuffs, Groceries, School Books & Stationery, Patent Medicines, &c.

From the Essex Register  
December 16, 1818

**NOTICE**  
**I**s hereby given, that the subscriber has removed from his late residence, near the Newburyport Turnpike Gates, to the House he lately purchased of Gideon Foster, Esq; being a little below the sign of the Eagle; where he will attend to the several branches of public business which he has heretofore been engaged in. He feels very grateful to his friends and the public for the liberal encouragement he has received, and solicits a continuance.  
**JOSEPH SHED.**  
Danvers, August 13, 1816.

From the Salem Gazette  
August 13, 1816

"The subscriber, having removed from Danvers to Lechmere Point (so called) in Cambridge takes this opportunity to inform his friends and the public that he will be at Messrs. Sanger and Merrill's store in Danvers between 1 and 2 o'clock P.M. on the first Saturday of the month through the present year. . . . The Shop formerly occupied by the subscriber in Danvers is to be let.

Joseph Shed, Cambridge,  
June 11, 1822

From the Salem Gazette  
July 4, 1822

## Dr. Andrew Nichols, 1785-1853

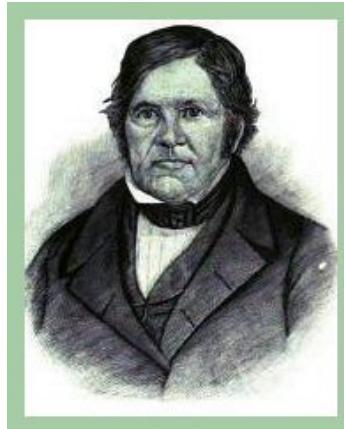
—Physician, Naturalist, Botanist, Inventor and fervent Abolitionist are only a few of the words that can describe Dr. Andrew Nichols.

He was born in the North Parish of Danvers in 1785, the third child and second son to Andrew and Eunice Nichols. During his childhood, he assisted his family on their farm until he expressed an interest in medicine. His parents sent him to Phillips Academy in Andover. In 1804, he trained first with a physician in Billerica, and then was accepted by Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse of Harvard as a student at the Longfellow House in Cambridge. During his time with Dr. Waterhouse, he also attended classes at Harvard between 1806 and 1807.

In 1808, he set up his practice in South Danvers. One of his first patients was a boy named George Peabody. Nichols removed a small cyst from his forehead, which seemed to have laid the foundation for their friendship. After George Peabody left South Danvers, he and Nichols began a lifelong correspondence.

Nichols' reputation quickly spread as people heard of his competence and compassion. While most of his patients resided in South Danvers, he was also called to Topsfield, Middleton, Lynnfield and, on at least two occasions, asked to consult on a cholera epidemic in Andover and Haverhill. In addition to his thriving practice, he also served as the surgeon for the 5<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteer Militia during the War of 1812.

In 1809, he married his Middleton cousin, Ruth. They had no children. A



Dr. Andrew Nichols

year after her death in 1832, he married Mary Holyoke Ward of Salem. Of their five children, only one son and daughter lived passed infancy, Andrew Jr. and Mary Ward Nichols.

Dr. Nichols was a member of the Massachusetts Medical Association from 1811 until his death, a charter member of the Jordan Lodge of Masons, one of the founders of the Essex Agricultural Society and the First Unitarian Congregational Society. He also assisted his friend Dr. Jacob Bigelow with his publication, *American Medical Botany*, and was the first president of the Essex County Natural History Society.

In 1819, he joined with George Southwick, George Osgood, William Sutton, Thomas Putnam and John Proctor in protesting the admission of any more slave states into the Union. After this first public protest against slavery, Nichols and his wife entertained many of the Abolitionist speakers who spoke in South Danvers,

including Wendell Phillips, William Lloyd Garrison, Parker Pillsbury and Henry (Box) Brown. In addition, it was reported by his friends that he often fed and housed fugitive slaves as they headed north to Canada.

In 1848, when the Free Soil Party was formed—its main objective to end slavery—Nichols volunteered to lead the committee from South Danvers.

Untriringly, he also improved on several inventions, including a formula for zinc paint, an improvement on the coupling which linked railroad cars, tubing to draw fresh air into his patients' sickrooms and a hydrostatic bed for the ill.

Perhaps it was his personal tragedies, which included the death of his first wife from tuberculosis as well as the deaths of his three children with his second wife, Mary, and many of his nephews and nieces that drew him toward poetry. He penned many pieces, for the Jordan Lodge, for the Centennial Celebration of the founding of Danvers in 1852, as well as many private ones for his wife and children.

Early in 1853, he became ill and though he'd helped many overcome their illnesses, he was unable to help himself and died on March 30, 1853. He was buried in Monumental Cemetery. On his monument is the epitaph, "Erected by the Friends of Humanity to Humanity's Friend."

"Here too I've suffered, mourned and shed  
The tears of grief, o'er loved ones dead.  
Committed to thy bosom lie  
All the dearest that could die,  
And through their graves, I farthest see  
Into a blest futurity.  
O Danvers! how can I forget  
A gem like thee so richly set,  
By all life's holiest powers enchas'd,  
And in my very heart encase'd."

From "Danvers: A Poem"  
By Dr. Andrew Nichols  
Written for Danvers' 1852  
Centennial Celebration

### CHOLERA AT ANDOVER.

We have been favored with the following Communication from Dr. Nichols, of Danvers.

At the request of Messrs. Suttons I have this day visited the sick at the Factory, Andover; where, from Drs. Kittredge, Underwood and Huse, a full history of all the cases which have excited so much anxiety in the community was obtained. The symptoms in Mrs. Hardy's case were decidedly those of malignant cholera, agreeing in most particulars with those which I saw at New York—viz. she was taken on Saturday with nausea, &c. after eating with her breakfast a few stale clams and cucumbers she continued about her work till dinner—went to bed—at 2 P. M. was taken with vomiting, purging and spasms.—

From *The Newburyport Herald*  
August 24, 1832

### Free Soil Convention.

The Free Soil party of the Second Congressional District held a Convention in Lyceum Hall, Salem, on the 27<sup>th</sup> inst., and organized by the choice of Horace K. Smith, Esq., of Chelsea, President; Dr. Andrew Nichols, of Danvers, J. B. Bodwell, of Reading, John Woolridge and A. C. Orne, of Marblehead, Vice Presidents; John Q. Hammond, of Lynn, and Sidney C. Bancroft, of Salem, Secretaries.

From *Emancipator and Republican*  
September 5, 1850

## Advertised Remedies

**Divine's Compound Pitch Lozenger,**  
A sure and pleasant remedy for  
**COUGHS, COLDS, CROUP, WHOOPING COUGH, BRONCHITIS, ASTHMA,**  
and, if lungs enough are left to sustain life, a certain  
**CURE for CONSUMPTION.**  
Warranted to relieve all LUNG COMPLAINTS. This remedy is pronounced by Clergymen, Orators and Vocalists to be the best in use for clearing the voice and relieving the irritation of the throat, so troublesome to public speakers. S. D. FULLER, Proprietor.

From the Jan. 25th, 1860  
South Danvers Wizard

**Mrs. M. A. LYON, M. D., Indian Physician,** Midwife, &c., No. 14 FRIEND STREET, a few doors from Hanover street. Mrs. Lyon is the only accomplished female in New England practising the Indian method of cure. It is needless here to speak of the claim of this treatment, which has stood the test of time. Mrs. L., has had twelve years of extensive practice in all the various diseases flesh is heir to. Many have been raised to perfect health that have been given up incurable. While there is life, don't despair. Medicine sent to all parts of the States. Letters containing two stamps will meet with attention. Good rooms for patients.

N. B.—Mrs. L.'s French Preparation for married ladies is superior to any thing offered, as it is safe and sure. DW

From the Jan. 25th, 1860  
South Danvers Wizard

 **THE NEW METHOD OF CURE, BY NUTRITION, (Vital Forces,) without medicine.** Sent to you by mail for one dime. Address to LA ROY SUNDERLAND, Boston Mass.

From the Jan. 1st, 1860  
South Danvers Wizard

**SHAKER'S FLUID EXTRACT OF VALERIAN,**  
FOR quieting the nerves, and promoting sleep; sold by T. A. SWEETSER, 37 Main st.

From the Dec. 14th, 1859  
South Danvers Wizard

**To Stop the Nose Bleeding.**—A piece of brown paper folded and placed between the upper lip and the gum will stop bleeding at the nose. Try it.

From the Dec. 14th, 1859  
South Danvers Wizard

**DR. MORAND'S ANTIDOTE,**  
A Specific Remedy for Gonorrhœa, Gleet, Stricture, and Diseases of the Organs of Generation.

This Valuable Remedy expels the virus effectually, and permanently eradicates the Disease from the system—in most cases effecting a radical cure in a few days. No change of diet or interruption of business is necessary. It is purely vegetable, and does not injure the health or constitution. Price \$1.00.

Single bottles englosed in a small sealed box, can be sent to any part of the country. Also,

**DR. MORAND'S INJECTION.**

The Injection, with syringe for application, neatly put up in a sealed box, can be sent to any part of the country with but little expense. PRICE 50 Cents.

M. S. D. U. R. R., & CO.,  
No. 26 TREMONT STREET BOSTON, General Agents.  
Orders addressed as above will receive prompt attention.

From the Dec. 14, 1859  
South Danvers Wizard

**Sweetser's Iceland Moss Candy,**

FOR the relief and cure of COUGHS and COLDS. In WHOOPING COUGH, taken in addition to the usual remedies, it affords much relief rendering the attacks less severe, and promoting a speedy cure.

Sold at Wholesale and Retail by  
T. A. SWEETSER, 37 Main street,  
and at wholesale in Boston, by the Drug and Patent Medicine dealers.

From the Dec. 7th, 1859  
South Danvers Wizard

Works consulted for this newsletter:

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- \* Danvers Town Records, 1752-1855